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SOCIAL MEDIA, AUTHORITARIAN CAPITALISM, AND DONALD TRUMP

MASHINES, NECROPOLITICS, NONPOLITICS

AUTHORITARIAN CAPITALISM, CAPITALISM, FRANKFURT SCHOOL, MARXISM, MEDIA THEORY, TRUMP, TWITTER

In the years from 1986 until 1999, the leader of the Austrian Freedom Party Jörg Haider with the help of anti-immigration slogans, politics as entertainment, a juvenile and dynamic habitus, as well as ridicule of opponents led his party from a voting share of 9.7% in 1986 to a share of 26.9% in 1999. The media helped making Haider and Haider helped the media attracting audiences and sales. Haider was the prototype of the new right's authoritarian leaders. Twenty years later, Haider is dead and right-wing authoritarianism has awoken to new life. What Ruth Wodak termed "Haiderization" has become a governing political model.

Neoliberal capitalism has brought about its own negative dialectic: Increasing inequalities have backfired and have not just advanced economic crisis, but also the emergence of new nationalisms and the politics of scapegoating immigrants, refugees and other minorities for social problems.

The result of the combination of authoritarian capitalism and capitalist "social" media is the decline of the public sphere and democracy. The book *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter* **explains the rise of authoritarian capitalism, nationalism and right-wing ideology in the context of Trump and Twitter**. Inspired by the works of Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, it re-invigorates the works on authoritarianism of Franz L. Neumann, Theodor W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Wilhelm Reich, Leo Löwenthal, and Klaus Theweleit in the social media age.

Capitalism as a societal formation – shaped by the accumulation by money capital, political power, reputation and attention – is an antagonistic system with immanent crisis potentials. These antagonisms exist between capital and multiple forms of paid and unpaid labour, global flows and localised identities, the invisibility and intransparency of power and the surveillant visibility of citizens and consumers, social insecurities and the securitisation of minorities after 9/11, neoliberal political elites/bureaucrats and citizens, party politics and social movements politics, universalism and particularism, unification and fragmentation, class politics and identity politics, collectivism and individualism, public/common goods and the marketization of everything. We experience a multidimensional economic, political, ideological and environmental crisis. Authoritarian capitalism is emerging out of these complex crises and creates new antagonisms. The communication of nationalism has taken on new forms. **The age of**

authoritarian capitalism is the age of social media, big data and fake news.

During the early days of the World Wide Web, many progressive observers assumed that representatives of the far-right are bad at using new technologies and that they hate the Internet. This assumption has been proven wrong. The Nazis had the Volksempfänger. Today's far-right leaders are masters of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Propaganda back then was Hitler- and Goebbels-generated content. Today, propaganda is party-generated nationalism from above that inspires user-generated ideology from below.
Far-right demagogues can be found all over the world – offline and online. Let us consider some examples:
The Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte, who says 'Hitler massacred three million Jews. Now, there's three million drug addicts. I'd be happy to slaughter them', has 4.3 million followers on Facebook. Turkey's President Recep Erdoğan, says he'll 'eradicate Twitter', while having more than 12.5 million followers there. India's nationalist President Narendra Modi is with 43 million followers on Facebook and 40 million on Twitter one of the world's most visible politicians on social media.

In a country with just nine million inhabitants, Austria's far-right Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache has around 800,000 Facebook-followers. Hungary's far-right President Viktor Orbán announces to his 600,000 Facebook-followers the fight against the 'flood of illegal and law violating migrants'. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders tweets to 950,000 followers that 'less Islam is more freedom'. Marine Le Pen tells her 2 million Twitter followers that 'immigration has weighed down wages'.

The Alternative for Germany tweets: 'All three minutes a burglary in Germany! Time to act: Control of the nation's borders and deportation of criminal migrants!'. UKIP's Nigel Farage has 1.1 million followers on Twitter that he uses for posting messages such as the one that 'EU migrant policies' have created 'the rape capital of Europe' in Malmö.

Authoritarian capitalism has emerged in different parts of the world. But in these different contexts, it is neither the same nor completely different. Just like there are many capitalisms that are united by capital's universalising tendency of commodification and exploitation, there is a unity in diversity of authoritarian capitalism. Vivek Chibber speaks of capitalism's two universalisms that have emerged in the West and the Global South – 'the universal logic of capital […] and social agents' universal interest in their well-being, which impels them to resist capital's expansionary drive. These forces impinge on both East and West, even if they do so with different intensities and in different registers'. Authoritarianism is capitalism's third universalism, an ever-present potential that emerges at specific points as reaction to the first universalism's economic, political and cultural contradictions and to the negation of the second universalism. **Capitalism's universalism turns out to be particularistic and shows its ugly face in the form of new nationalisms.**

Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump
Follow

North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the "Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times." Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!

4:49 PM - 2 Jan 2018

192,022 Retweets 499,606 Likes

Donald Trump is not just the world's most powerful capitalist-turned-president, but with 48 million followers also the most visible far-right Twitter-politician. In addition, 24 million users follow him on Facebook, and 8.4 million on Instagram. **Twitter is the capitalist universe of the individualist self: It is a me-centred medium that lives through the accumulation of followers, likes and re-tweets. The custom of liking and re-tweeting on Twitter appeals to Trump's narcissism.** Trump makes use of Twitter for broadcasting 140-character sound bites about what he likes, dislikes, loves, and hates. Reality TV ("The Apprentice") and Twitter are Trump's preferred two contemporary formats of public communication. Twitter supports narcissism and Trump's "first person singular"-politics. Trump constructs himself as the great little man on Twitter.

Trump is a fake news machine. Fake news is as old as tabloid media and capitalist media. What is new about it is that on social media, we find user-generated fake news that are compressed into short tweets, messages, memes, images and videos and circulate at high speed through the globally networked communication environment of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Automated politics in the form of social media bots creates fake attention so that it becomes difficult to discern what is communicated by humans and what by machines.

For changing the world, we need a New Left. But a New Left also needs frameworks for understanding the world. For changing the world, we therefore need to also interpret it. My book *Digital Demagogue* takes an approach that combines critical political economy, ideology critique and political psychology for explaining the emergence of authoritarian capitalism and its ideology, organisations, movements and individuals.

There is no automatic connection between one's economic position and political consciousness. The support of authoritarian movements is not just a matter of class structures and ideological efforts, but also has to do with the history of an individual's personal, economic, political and cultural socialisation that makes him or her more or less affectually prone to far-right propaganda. **Right-wing authoritarianism often intensifies in and after political-economic crises, but also involves conscious ideological projects that try to speak to human's hopes, fears, desires, and aggressions. A critical theory of authoritarianism and nationalism needs to combine political economy, ideology critique, and political psychology.** This was the approach

taken by thinkers such as Franz L. Neumann, whose works remain highly topical in the age of Trump and have influenced the approach taken in writing *Digital Demagogue*.

The only alternative and way of fighting back is the renewal of the Left under the premise of socialist humanism. Such politics require social reforms and media reforms. We need a socialist-humanist media politics that works towards introducing a participatory media fee, slow media, Club 2.0, the taxation of online advertising and transnational media corporations, outlawing targeted and behavioural political online advertising, the substitution of algorithmic activity by paid human work, the creation of an alternative Internet and a public service Internet, etc.

Authoritarian capitalism serves the few by selling nationalist and racist ideology to the many. And it does so with the help of online tools. We need an Internet and a world that serve the many, not the few. We need socialism and humanism. A new socialist humanism.

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Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter is available in English from Pluto Press [distributed in North America by University of Chicago Press] and in German from VSA Verlag. On March 1, it will be launched at an event in London.

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